

Swinging into the Future

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Alternative futures. Futurism. Futurology. Futuristics. Not only are new words being added to our vocabulary, but new curriculums are being added to schools and colleges throughout the nation. Yet few writers have seen or expressed the linkage among alternative futures, career development, and career guidance.

If there is a general recognition of the need to be planning for tomorrow, it would seem that career guidance should assign an especially high priority to assisting individuals to project into the future and make decisions and plans that are consonant with their futuristic images. Traditionally the past has been studied as a means to understanding the present. Perhaps now is the time to develop a heritage of the future, to increase everyone's awareness of the need and capability to think and act futuristically. For knowledge deals with the past, but all decisions are in the future. And decisions and plans are what career guidance is all about.

Fortunately, there is ample evidence that counselors are aware of the need to consider the implications of the future. Long before such thinking became popular, Wrenn (1962) addressed himself to imagining the future and considering the implications of that future for counselor preparation and practice. The influence of his creative and forward thinking made itself evident in sub-

sequent journal articles and APGA programs. Since that time, many counselors have demonstrated their awareness of the importance of futuristic considerations and have been responsive to the need for special kinds of experiences for their clients.

While the futuristic literature abounds with doomsday and Utopian predictions as to what the future will bring, relatively little attention has been given to the demands that will be made on individuals if they are to cope effectively with the world they will experience. Even the recent *Saturday Review/World* anniversary issue (1974), devoted to probing the future, seemed to share this partiality for emphasizing technological developments and macroprograms while slighting discussion of demands on and needed behaviors of individuals in the future. Therefore, the focus of this article is, first, on imaging new demands that will have an impact on the citizen of 2000 A.D. from a career development perspective and, second, on determining what career guidance strategies should be invoked now to prepare for the future.

IMAGES OF THE BEHAVIORAL FUTURE

Futuristic forecasters regularly have cautioned against making a common error: negative forecasting, or underestimating the amount and direction of change. It is understandable that one may choose to play it safe by making very conservative and limited predictions of the changes that may occur. For present purposes, however, overshooting may be more helpful than undershooting; if one plans for events before they happen, one has

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probably not harmed anyone but rather has provided individuals with behaviors that anticipate conditions yet to come.

Choosing

A proliferation of choices of near exponential proportions will characterize people's life space in the future. In every aspect of their lives—types of schools and colleges and offerings within them, occupations, products, services, life styles—individuals will be continuously confronted with having to make critical life decisions, often with only limited information and with pressing time constraints. Even now victims of overchoice are numerous in society; they are people who are unable or unwilling to make decisions or who avoid the need to choose by adopting rigid, stereotyped attitudes and behaviors.

If individuals in the future are to utilize the offerings of a pluralistic society, they must possess as part of their coping armamentarium keen competencies in option generation and decision making. Nothing less than a systematic approach and a confidence born of successful mastery of complex decisions will suffice. Successful outcomes will be the result of an individual's capacity to create new options where it was believed that none existed and to experience decision making as corroboration of the power of the self to enhance its becoming. Coping behavior will be exemplified not by a passive acceptance of what must be done but by a striving for those situations that will allow an individual to generate and adopt ideas and plans that will augment his or her attainments.

Learning

The transient society of the future will ask much of its citizens. For those for whom it reserves its most bountiful rewards, it will demand a yearning for learning, a zesty appetite for mastering the new and the challenging. The span of most ideas, thoughts, concepts, and skills

will be considerably reduced. A fact learned today will need to be replaced with a new fact tomorrow. Permanence of ideas and skills will be an atavism to be combated.

In particular, individuals will need to adopt new modes of learning to assimilate large bodies of information, to evaluate the quality and utility of information, and to draw valid inferences and generalizations. Of much importance will be the capacity of individuals to utilize information technology through cable TV, videotapes, and other media in order to bring to any situation all available information and accumulated experience. Books of the future will be the custom products of skillful users of information systems who artfully extract from massive information banks and put between covers all that is relevant and pertinent to their particular needs.

To a large extent, the richness and vibrance of an individual's life career will depend on that person's capacity to recycle and renew his or her ideas and skills. On career guidance rests a unique responsibility for the quality of self-learning and self-exploration. Thorough and continuing self-learning will provide the base for knowing the world outside the person.

Relating

"How can I maximize my ability to share fully my thoughts and feelings with this person I have just met?" may be the relating mode of the citizen of the future. Discarding age-worn notions of the desirability of developing relationships cautiously and slowly, people will immediately give to and draw from each encounter that which they can. An intimacy delayed in a transient and mobile society will be an intimacy forever lost. Mutual intimacy may be the elixir of future life careers—a means for one person to share something with another and in turn be the recipient of what the other can offer, both emerging enriched, even

ennobled, by the experience. With the potential for enhanced life roles as family member, worker, learner, and leisure participant, relationship skills are too important to be left to chance; career guidance must focus on providing that upon which careers depend.

Working

"I want daily meaning as well as daily bread out of my work." "I want to be remembered for something." "The system stinks." "We have focused on the work and ignored the worker." Such expressions give voice to an emerging re-determination of what work must be if it is to be performed effectively. Participants' decision making, work enrichment, teamwork, and creation of worker task forces communicate a sense of more significant worker participation in the process of work performance. The literature is already replete with discussions regarding a predicted reduction in time spent in paid work, improved physical working conditions, and the introduction of enrichment programs designed to aid workers in experiencing a sense of craftsmanship and pride in what they do and in participating in decisions that vitally affect their working lives.

An important consequence of the changing work scene is that, although work will become more rewarding, it will also place greater demands on workers. They will need, as part of their work behaviors, the various attributes that have been described here as being necessary for coping with life. Higher-level work will require workers with higher-level skills in learning, relating, making decisions, and resolving conflicts.

Bridging

A probable aspect of life in the future is the fractionalization of society into self-interest groups, each group seeking to promote its ends and frequently warring with groups whose goals it sees as being

in conflict with its own. The increasing number of advocates of this or that, the liberation of special population groups, greater personal expression and involvement in decision making in all spheres of life suggest that people will increasingly find themselves at odds with one another.

Time itself will become an important determinant of personal attitudes and viewpoints. With events and situations changing so rapidly, individuals who have had experiences that are very similar and that took place almost at the same time may find that what each has experienced bears such slight resemblance to what the other has experienced that they will view and respond to ostensibly the same experience very differently.

The gaps—between rich and poor, educated and noneducated, young and old, conservative and liberal, technologist and humanist, to name just a few—will likely proliferate and widen. Conflict in the future will be fundamental to the human condition. Basic to living and coping in this society will be the development of effective group and individual approaches to defusing conflict and building interpersonal bridges. When appropriately viewed and responded to, conflict need not be debilitating. In fact, it can be a useful catalyst for change. The challenge for career guidance is to assist individuals to identify potential and existing conflicts in their life space and, by attitude and skill, promote the willingness to deal directly with those conflicts. Bridge builders will be highly esteemed and in demand!

Switching

The citizen of the 21st century may be one who can smoothly and artfully change from one life style to another, from occupation to occupation, and comfortably assume the role appropriate to any given situation. The ability to switch occupations, locations, goals, priorities, and mode of living may be an

important element in realizing one's potential. In a society that has traditionally espoused the virtues of permanence and steadiness, there must occur a reorientation that will facilitate individuals' adopting and adapting life elements important to them at any stage of living. Career guidance should introduce the individual to the possibility of switching early in his or her education and should assist each individual not to stumble between switches.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER GUIDANCE

It has been said that even the crudest of maps in early times were historically significant, for they gave visibility to areas requiring further exploration and also suggested routes along which exploration could proceed. Perhaps this discussion can be compared to a primitive map and its value assessed in the contribution it may make to further thought and analysis of futuristic career guidance. The following implications are presented in a spirit of stimulating the discovery of new futures.

1. The life career that individuals develop for themselves will in large measure be the outcome of the range and depth of their experiences and the capacity they possess for identifying and developing alternatives and choosing among them. It therefore stands to reason that the utmost importance must be given in career guidance to providing the double E: exploring and experiencing. It is unlikely that meaningful choices and plans can occur without them. The challenge is to so design career guidance programs that all aspects of life career development are thoroughly explored and each individual is given the opportunity to experience areas in which she or he must make critical plans and decisions.

2. An enormous imbalance exists presently in school and college curriculums. The past receives the most attention, the

present some attention, and the future little or no attention. Career guidance can serve as a vehicle for raising the question, "What do my present efforts have to do with what I will do in the future?" Career guidance can serve to sensitize others to the importance of future-mindedness and to reinforce the need to adopt future-focused role images. Discussions of what can and should be done in developing futuristic programs are contained in two ERIC Counseling and Personnel Services Information Center publications (ERIC/CAPS 1971; ERIC/CAPS 1974).

3. A common difficulty in career guidance is having too many unitarians—people who conceive career guidance as the stringing together of a number of units and calling them a developmental program. The program may look comprehensive and relevant on paper, but it rarely is that to the participant. What is not needed is another unit on futurism plugged into existing career guidance programs. An integrated and sequential approach, the Life Career Development System (Walz, Smith & Benjamin 1974), emphasizes futuristic thinking and behaving throughout and concludes with a module devoted to assisting users in launching into the future. It illustrates how future-mindedness can become a continuous and integral aspect of life career development and focuses on preparing individuals with futuristic attitudes and skills.

The mind-stretching projections and scenarios forecasting of futuristics have to be linked to human career development and must call for increased dialogue between counseling personnel and the futurists. The future will ask of its contemporaries that they be able to conceive of themselves and the world in such a way as to behave differently from the ways people have been using for hundreds of years. Individuals may either stumble into the future without planning or forethought, or they may swing into

the future with knowledge, grace, and aplomb. Futuristic career guidance can make the difference. What's your pleasure, counselor? ■

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Why do we continue to assume that there is some inherent logic holding together the passage of a decade and the need to find something different to do in education, thus making earlier proposals obsolete? Why are the seventies the time for career education, whereas the sixties were not? More important, will career education have sufficient vitality to make it into the eighties? If career education is narrowly defined as "getting students ready for a job," the "topics by decades" syndrome of curriculum development mercifully works to our advantage and extinguishes such cramped aims. If career education includes among its characteristics the development of a positive self-concept, the examination of alternative life styles, and the interplay between self-concept, desired life style, and the choosing of possible occupations, then it would be worthwhile to renew its option for the eighties, even at the risk of encountering predictable sentiment for something "new."

Career education is a direct reflection of educators' attempt to make school relevant to its clientele. However, it sometimes appears that in our rush to get kids ready for the "real" world of occupational selection and implementation we act as though students are inhaling artificial air until they leave the "unreal" environment called school. Attending school is no less real to the student than the assembly line is to a production worker at General Motors, than meeting patients is to a physician, than publishing is to a professor. Kids in school are already into a career; it's called being a student. And for the great majority, this first career will last for at least eleven years. The implications are clear: Career education programs, from their initial applications, should provide for student involvement in a systematic and continuously evolving study of the school environment.

Thus the school culture, within which the first career unfolds, provides the parameters for students to pursue such questions as: Why am I in school? Why do we gather into structures called classrooms and groups called classes? What are the expected roles of teachers and students within this setting? How do expected roles change? How does learning take place? What would the ideal school look like? How can I actively shape, rather than passively implement, this first career of mine? The inquiry activity pursuant to such questions should provide a firsthand, "realistic" setting within which students begin to contemplate, anticipate, and plan for their next career, which—unlike the first one—will probably not be predetermined by society.—**Frank L. Ryan, Associate Professor of Education, University of California—Riverside.**